

**An archaeological evaluation
at 1 York Road,
Earls Colne, Essex
March 2009**

**report prepared by
Ben Holloway and Howard Brooks**

**on behalf of
Mr Kurt Manders**

CAT project ref.: 09/3a
NGR: TL 8575 2888
HEM project code: ECYR 09
Braintree Museum code: (pending)



Colchester Archaeological Trust
12 Lexden Road,
Colchester,
Essex CO3 3NF

tel.: (01206) 541051
(01206) 500124
email: archaeologists@catuk.org

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EHER summary sheet

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1 Summary

The site lies to the south of a possible Roman road, the projected course of which coincides with the modern High Street, and at the southern edge of the built-up area of medieval Earls Colne.

A 10m-long evaluation trench was positioned in the centre of the site and within the footprint of the proposed extension. Six archaeological features were revealed - a medieval pit and compacted gravel surface, and four post-medieval or modern pits. The medieval and later pits probably represent domestic activity, ie rubbish-pit digging, in the back yards or gardens of properties fronting onto York Road and the High Street. The gravel surface, which was cut by a medieval pit and may itself be medieval in date, is probably located too far east to be the surface of a precursor of York Road. Instead, it may have been a domestic yard surface.

There was no evidence of Roman roadside settlement. Nor were there any features (for instance, plot boundaries) relating to the medieval or post-medieval development of Earls Colne.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the archive report on an archaeological trial-trenching evaluation in the back garden to the rear of 1 York Road, Earls Colne, Essex.

In relation to the modern street plan, the evaluation site is in the centre of Earls Colne at the crossroads formed by York Road, the High Street and Queens Road. The garden is located at NGR TL 8575 2888, and is a rectangular area of overgrown grass, shrubs and tree stumps, measuring approximately 40m x 9m. 1 York Road is part of a building consisting of three properties, dating to the early 20th century.

The archaeological work was commissioned by Mr Kurt Manders, and was carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) on the 19th March 2009. Post-excavation work was carried out in March-May 2009.

The Historic Environment Management (HEM) team of Essex County Council (ECC) were consulted by Braintree District Council in February 2009 on a planning application (08/02092/FUL) for the construction of an extension to the house at 1 York Road. In response to consultation, the HEM team made the following recommendation, in line with *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: archaeology and planning* (PPG16: DoE 1990, section 3).

'... The applicant should be required to conduct a field evaluation to establish the nature and complexity of the surviving archaeological deposits. This should be undertaken prior to a planning decision being made. This evaluation would enable due consideration to be given to the archaeological implications and would lead to proposals for mitigation of disturbance and/or the need for further investigation ...'

A brief detailing the required archaeological work was written by the HEM team officer (Teresa O'Connor 2009), in which a 5% evaluation by trial-trenching was specified. All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with a WSI (Written Scheme of Investigation) produced by CAT in response to the HEM team brief and agreed with the HEM team.

In addition to the WSI, all fieldwork and reporting was done in accordance with CAT's *Policies and procedures* (CAT 2008), the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IfA 2008a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IfA 2008b). The guidance contained in the documents *Management of research projects in the historic environment* (MoRPHE) and *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14) was also followed.

3 Archaeological and historical background

This section is based on records held by the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) and Medlycott 1998.

Little is known about Earls Colne before the medieval period. However, excavations by Fairweather in 1937 uncovered substantial Roman building remains on the site of the priory, which is 800m to the east of the evaluation site. These were thought to be the remains of a villa (EHER no 16259; Medlycott 1998, 11). The projected route of a Roman road (EHER no 8706) in White Colne, to the east of Earls Colne, coincides with the modern High Street in Earls Colne, indicating a possible Roman origin for the route.

There are references to Earls Colne in a number of Anglo-Saxon wills (Reaney 1935), and a reference to a minster in 1045 (thought to have been located on the site of the later parish church).

The estate was held by Wulfwin prior to the Norman conquest, and post-conquest the manor was granted to Alberic de Vere and remained with his descendants, the Earls of Oxford, until the 16th century. A Benedictine priory was founded by the de Veres between 1101 and 1107, dividing the Earls Colne estate into two manors, one held by the Earl of Oxford and the other by the priory. At some point before 1309, the town was granted a market charter by the de Vere family (exact date unknown). The town developed along the High Street, centred on the market-place.

Earls Colne remained a small market town into the 19th century when the Atlas Iron Works was founded, prompting further development of the town as the works expanded and housing was built to accommodate the workers (EHER no 15005; Medlycott 1998, 12).

The evaluation site lies within the area of medieval growth and is adjacent to the line of the Roman road.

4 Aims

The aim of the evaluation was to establish the character, extent, date, significance and condition of any archaeological remains and deposits likely to be affected by groundworks associated with the construction of the extension to the house at 1 York Road. Of specific interest was evidence of possible Roman roadside settlement, and activity associated with the medieval and post-medieval development of Earls Colne.

5 Results of the evaluation (Figs 1-3)

This section gives an archaeological summary of the evaluation trench (T1), with context and finds dating information.

A mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless bucket progressively stripped the topsoil and upper soil horizons down to the uppermost surviving level of archaeological significance. All further investigation was carried out by hand.

Trench 1: summary

T1 was located in the centre of the evaluation site within the footprint of the proposed extension.

The evaluation trench was excavated through a modern humic topsoil (L1, 150-200mm thick), and a slightly leached-out silty clay (L2, 100-150mm thick). L2 sealed the natural (L3, a yellow/grey boulder clay containing occasional gravel patches).

Six archaeological features were excavated. Five of these features were pits (F2, F3, F4, F5, F6), with F2-F5 being dated by the presence of peg-tile and post-medieval and modern pottery.

F2 had cut through an earlier, compacted gravel surface (F1). Pottery recovered from the fill of pit F6, located on the northern edge of the compacted gravel surface F1, is of medieval date, and the gravel surface may therefore also be of medieval date.

F1 was only found in the southern half of the trench. It was well-consolidated at its southern edge, but became less well-defined and patchier towards its northern edge, in the central part of the trench.

Trench 1 – context and finds data.

Feature no	Type	Dated finds	Phase
F1	compacted gravel surface	pottery	?medieval
F2	pit	peg-tile, pottery	post-medieval
F3	pit	pottery, bone, peg-tile	post-medieval
F4	pit	brick, peg-tile, coal	modern
F5	pit	peg-tile, brick	post-medieval
F6	pit	pottery	medieval

6 Finds

6.1 Post-Roman pottery

by Howard Brooks

Description of pottery

Post-Roman pottery fabrics are after *CAR 7*. Fabrics present include Fabric 20 (medieval sandy grey ware); Fabric 21 (sandy orange ware); Fabric 40 (post-medieval red earthenware - PMRE); Fabric 21 (sandy orange ware); and Fabric 48d (modern ironstone). A list of fabrics by context is given in the catalogue below.

Comment

This is a small group (18 sherds, 547g). However, there are several points of interest. The two sherds of residual Roman pottery add to the very slight evidence for Roman activity along the High Street. Likewise, the medieval date of F6 fits with the location of the site in the built-up area of the medieval town (Medlycott 1998). The larger quantities of post-medieval and modern pottery indicating activity on this site from at least the 18th to the 20th centuries are related to the post-medieval expansion of the town.

Catalogue of pottery

F1

Finds no 2

sandy orange ware (Fabric 21), 1 sherd, 6g. Slightly micaceous fabric.

Group date: 13th century

F2

Finds no 1

medieval sandy grey ware (Fabric 20), 1 sherd, 3g.

post-medieval red earthenware (PMRE, Fabric 40), 1 sherd, 2g.

Group date: 17th-18th century

F3

Finds no 6

post-medieval red earthenware (PMRE, Fabric 40), 3 sherds, 61g. One sherd is fine fabric.

Group date: 17th-18th century

F4

Finds no 7

post-medieval red earthenware (PMRE, Fabric 40), 1 sherd, 43g. Large jug rim with stub of handle.

Group date: 17th-18th century

F6

Finds no 5

1 ?Roman sherd, sandy grey ware, possibly mid to late Roman, 6g.

medieval sandy grey ware (Fabric 20), 3 sherds, 18g.

Group date: 13th century

U/S

Finds no 3

1 Roman sherd, grey ware, possibly mid to late Roman, 9g.

medieval sandy grey ware (Fabric 20), 1 sherd, 7g.

sandy orange ware (Fabric 21), 1 sherd, 3g.

post-medieval red earthenware (PMRE, Fabric 40), 1 sherd, 39g.
modern ironstone (Fabric 48d), 3 sherds, 350g. Large platter.

Group date: 19th-20th century

6.2 Animal bone

by Adam Wightman

The animal bones were identified and described in accordance with Cohen & Serjeantson 1996, Davis 1992, Hillson 1986, Payne 1987, and Serjeantson 1996.

The animal bone is generally well-preserved. This is attested to by the presence of a delicate fragment of the axial skeleton of a small bird. The presence of large fragments of *bos* (cow) and *ovis* (sheep/goat) bone indicates the presence, and probable consumption, of these animals in the vicinity of the site. The *bos* tibia fragment had been chopped on the distal articulation, probably during disarticulation. Despite this being the only evidence of butchery observed, the assemblage is most likely represents domestic consumption/butchery waste. The larger fragment of axial bird bone may be from a domestic species of *galliform* (chicken); however, the smaller bone could be from a wild-bird species. The presence of *canids* (dogs) in the vicinity is suggested by the gnawed *ovis* metatarsal.

This small sample of bone tells us very little about the role that animals played in the lives of the people of post-medieval Earls Colne other than the presence of *canids* and probable consumption of *bos*, *ovis* and bird species here.

6.3 Small finds

by Nina Crummy

SF1 (4) L2. Copper-alloy four-hole button, front around the holes says 'bauble ring' and an illegible word divided by two double horseshoes, back is plain. Probably dates from late post-medieval to modern. Width 16mm, depth at holes 3.7mm.

6.4 Clay tobacco-pipes

by Nina Crummy

Most of the clay tobacco-pipe assemblage consists of plain stem fragments that cannot be closely dated. The exceptions are part of two bowls from pit F3 that belongs to Colchester Type 7, dated to c 1670-1700 (CAR 5, 49-50).

(6) F3. Type 7 complete bowl and partial stem of Type 7, with a rouletted rim and plain foot; Type 7 bowl with rouletted rim and partly lined foot.

Six plain stem fragments. 1) Length 103 mm; bore diameter 3 mm. 2) Length 72 mm; bore diameter 3 mm. 3) Length 70 mm; bore diameter 3 mm. 4) Length 60 mm; bore diameter 25 mm. 5) Length 50 mm; bore diameter 3 mm. 6) Length 46 mm; bore diameter 3 mm.

7 Discussion

The case for Roman activity in Earls Colne is based on the presence of the remains of a substantial Roman structure at the site of the priory (800m to the east of the evaluation site), and on the fact that there is a double-ditched cropmark (possibly a Roman road) to the north of White Colne village which, if projected, would coincide with the line of Earls Colne High Street. If the modern High Street does follow the line of a Roman road, then it is reasonable to assume that there was roadside activity along it. No Roman features were revealed during this evaluation, but the presence of two residual Roman sherds leaves open the question of whether there was roadside activity here in the Roman period.

The majority of the features identified during this evaluation were pits of post-medieval or medieval date containing domestic rubbish such as fragments of pottery, animal bone and oyster shells. The pits are, therefore, best interpreted as rubbish-pits or middens dug into the back yards or gardens of adjacent properties.

Evidence for the medieval or urban development of the town can take the form of plot boundary ditches. No such ditches were found in this evaluation. However, the trench was located in the back garden of the property, and it is probably the case

that such ditches would be closer to the street frontage, in an area not tested by this evaluation.

Although four of the excavated features (ie pits F2-F5) are post-medieval and later, pit F6 and surface F1 are earlier – pit F6 is certainly medieval, and gravel surface F1 is probably medieval. The pit was presumably a domestic rubbish-pit, and the extent of the gravel surface may indicate a yard rather than a path. There was no evidence that it was a working surface for light industrial activity, and it is probably too far east to have been a precursor of York Road. As with the later pits, F1 and F6 appear to be associated with buildings fronting onto the High Street prior to the construction of the 20th-century house which now occupies the site.

8 Acknowledgements

CAT would like to thank Mr Kurt Manders for commissioning and funding the work.

The project was managed by B Holloway, and the site work was carried out by B Holloway and C Lister.

The project was monitored for the ECC HEM team by Teresa O'Connor.

9 References

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|----------------------------|-------|--|
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10 Abbreviations and glossary

axial	bones in the head and trunk of the body
context	specific location on an archaeological site, especially one where finds are made
ECC	Essex County Council
EHHER	Essex Historic Environment Record, held by Essex County Council
feature	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a floor; can contain 'contexts'
fill	the soil filling up a hole such as a pit or ditch
HEM	Historic Environment Management team
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
NGR	National Grid Reference
Roman	the period from AD 43 to about AD 430

11 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is currently held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at 12 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3NF, but will be permanently deposited with Braintree Museum (accession code pending).

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Distribution list:

Mr Kurt Manders
Essex Historic Environment Record, Essex County Council
Braintree Museum



Colchester Archaeological Trust

12 Lexden Road,
Colchester,
Essex CO3 3NF

tel.: (01206) 541051
(01206) 500124

email: archaeologists@catuk.org

Checked by: Philip Crummy
Date: 01.06.09

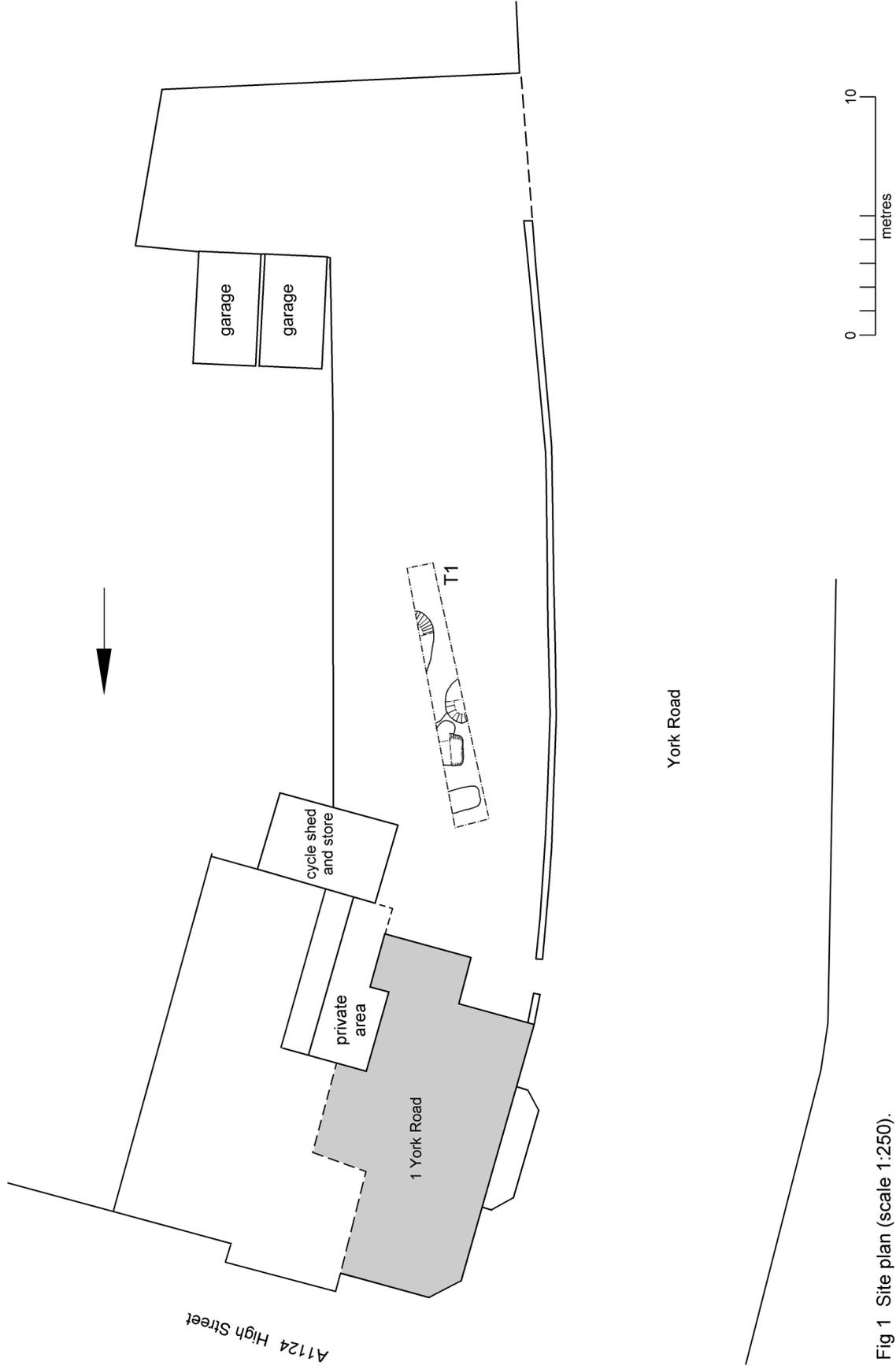


Fig 1 Site plan (scale 1:250).

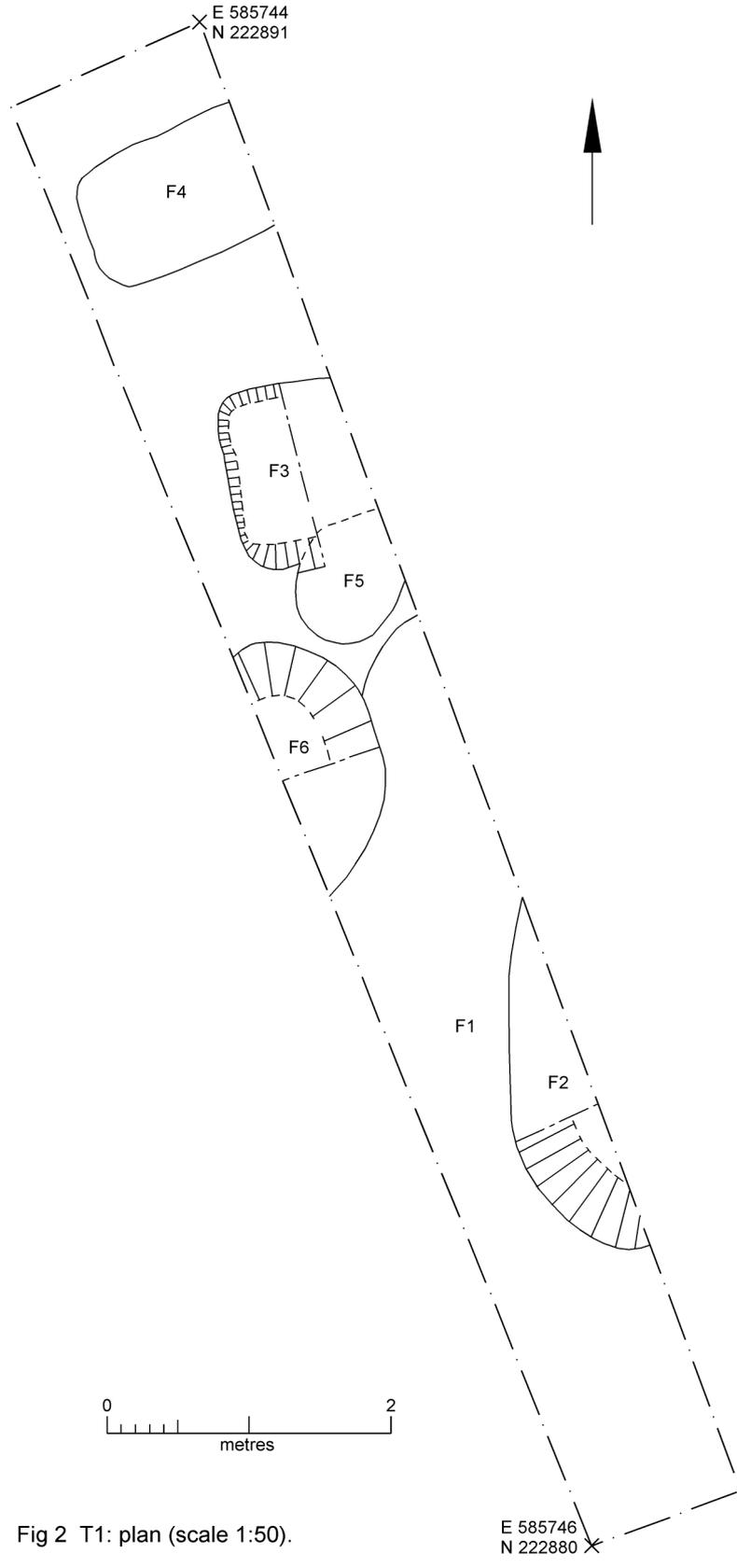


Fig 2 T1: plan (scale 1:50).

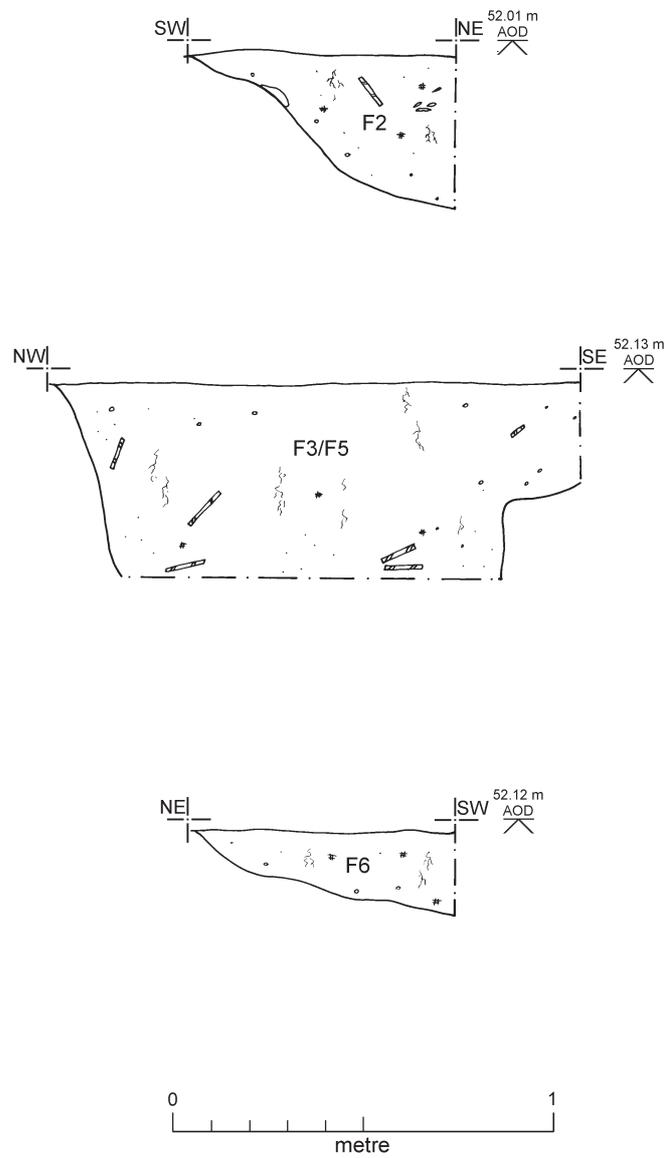


Fig 3 Sections.

Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

Summary sheet

Site address: 1 York Road, Earls Colne, Essex	
Parish: Earls Colne	District: Braintree
NGR: TL 8575 2888	Site codes: HEM code - ECYR 09 Museum accession code - (pending)
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: March 2009	Size of area investigated: 10 x 1.8m trench (site 360 sq m)
Location of curating museum: Braintree Museum	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related EHER nos: 8706, 15005, 16259
Final report: CAT Report 507 and summary in <i>EAH</i>	
Periods represented: post-medieval, modern	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results:</p> <p><i>The site lies to the south of a possible Roman road, the projected course of which coincides with the modern High Street, and at the southern edge of the built-up area of medieval Earls Colne.</i></p> <p><i>A 10m-long evaluation trench was positioned in the centre of the site and within the footprint of the proposed extension. Six archaeological features were revealed - a medieval pit and compacted gravel surface, and four post-medieval or modern pits. The medieval and later pits probably represent domestic activity, ie rubbish-pit digging, in the back yards or gardens of properties fronting onto York Road and the High Street. The gravel surface, which was cut by a medieval pit and may itself be medieval in date, is probably located too far east to be the surface of a precursor of York Road. Instead, it may have been a domestic yard surface.</i></p> <p><i>There was no evidence of Roman roadside settlement. Nor were there any features (for instance, plot boundaries) relating to the medieval or post-medieval development of Earls Colne.</i></p>	
Previous summaries/reports: None	
Keywords: medieval, post-medieval, modern, gravel surface, pit	Significance: *
Author of summary: Howard Brooks	Date of summary: June 2009